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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000955

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2019

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SUBJECT: TFH01: HONDURAS COUP SITREP #59 09/23/2009 AS OF
NOON LOCAL (14:00 EDT)

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 953 AND OTHERS

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

Diplomatic Process

11. (U) De facto regime foreign minister Carlos Lopez Contreras read a statement in English on television the evening of September 22. A question and answer period in Spanish followed. Lopez Contreras' statement said de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti is ready to engage in a discussion with President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to find a resolution to the country's political crisis. He added, however, that the discussion must be within the framework of the Honduran Constitution and that Zelaya must pledge to respect the general elections scheduled for November 29. Lopez Contreras stated that this offer would not exempt President Zelaya from having to face justice for the crimes with which he is charged. Lopez Contreras said the delegation of Organization of American States Foreign Ministers that visited Honduras in late August could return as mediators, as well as a senior OAS observer (presumably OAS Secretary General Insulza).

12. (C) The Ambassador spoke by phone with Brazilian Charge d'Affaires, who thanked the USG for assistance in allowing employees and Zelaya supporters to depart the embassy compound September 22, and for facilitating the resumption of utilities and deliveries of food and drinking water for those remaining inside. Details on the conversation and current conditions at the Brazilian Embassy will be reported septel.

Domestic Political Situation

13. (C) Police contacts have expressed concern to Embassy employees regarding reports of armed groups en route to Tegucigalpa from Olancho and elsewhere. Police contacts claim they have information that the pro-Zelaya movement is

planning their "final push" for the evening or night of September 23, with the intent of returning President Zelaya to the Presidential Palace by force. (Comment: We have no information to confirm this claim. End comment.)

Civil Unrest and Security Environment

¶4. (SBU) Honduran Red Cross contacts informed PolCouns the morning of September 23 that the Red Cross had sent an ambulance to Chochi Sosa Stadium September 22 at the request of de facto authorities to take three detainees to the hospital for treatment of fractures. Red Cross personnel accompanying the ambulance reported there were about 150 detainees and that the ones removed by the Red Cross presented the most serious injuries. Human Rights Officer and Conoff went to Chochi Sosa Stadium the morning of September 23 to follow up on reports that detainees held there by police were being mistreated. There were no detainees present when Emboffs arrived, and stadium caretakers said the detainees had all been removed before dark the evening of September 22. This information tracks with claims made by police contacts to an Embassy employee on September 22 that all detainees in the stadium would be let go before the end of the day September 22. Pro-Zelaya Embassy contacts reported rumors of noises coming from the stadium overnight and mistreatment of detainees inside. The Embassy will continue to seek information on the whereabouts and status of detainees.

¶5. (SBU) According to police and press sources, there were small pro-Zelaya protests in at least 15 neighborhoods around Tegucigalpa overnight. In most cases, the protestors were primarily youths who overturned cars, threw rocks, and occasionally looted shops. In the Pedregal neighborhood, damage was more extensive, with numerous shops looted and

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vandalized. Police contacts reported 29 arrests for curfew violations overnight in Tegucigalpa.

¶6. (U) Press reports depicted a small to medium (500-1,000) anti-coup protest in San Pedro Sula on September 22 being dispersed forcibly by security forces. Police sources denied any protest in San Pedro Sula was forcibly dispersed.

Infrastructure and Communications

¶7. (SBU) De facto authorities lifted the curfew from 1000 to 1700 local (noon - 1900 EDT) to allow shopping for groceries and other supplies. Supermarkets were immediately inundated with customers and lines outside stores stretched around the block. Stores quickly ran out of basic goods in the rush. In accordance with the hours of the temporary lifting of the curfew, land borders were re-opened and domestic flights were allowed to resume.

Consular/ACS

¶8. (U) The Consular Section issued revised warden messages the evening of September 22, and again on September 23. The Consular Section continues to regularly update ACS information on the Embassy website. The Consular Section has been in regular contact with a group of 34 Amcit students who were at the Marriot Hotel, awaiting an opportunity to depart. The group reported September 23 that they would attempt to depart overland via El Salvador during the lifted curfew hours.

Media Update

¶9. (U) Pro-Zelaya television channel 36 again went off the air September 23 as it broadcast video of security forces using a noise-making device at the Brazilian Embassy.

¶10. (C) DAO notes the security forces have continued to deploy this sub-base sound device at the Brazilian Embassy.

Embassy Operations

¶11. (U) The Embassy is closed today, September 23, due to the curfew (Note: the announcement that the curfew was temporarily lifted from 1000-1700 local came from de facto authorities only minutes before 1000 local. The extension of the all-day curfew had been announced immediately following the Lopez Contreras press conference the evening of September ¶22. End note), with only essential personnel present. All other personnel have been instructed to abide by the curfew. The Embassy is prepared to reopen September 24 if no curfew is in effect.

¶12. (SBU) All Mission employees and dependents have been instructed to remain within Tegucigalpa. No non-essential travel, either personal or official is authorized until further notice. All TDY travel into Honduras has been suspended for the remainder of the week.
LLORENS